

ON A NEW INTERPRETATION OF PLATO'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

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I

PROFESSOR Wild's recent book on Plato¹ is not simply a historical work. His presentation of Plato's doctrine of man is animated by the zeal of a reformer and is meant to bring about a radical reorientation of the "philosophy of culture." Thoroughly dissatisfied with modern philosophy in all its forms, and unwilling to take refuge in Thomism, Wild turns back to classical philosophy, to the teaching of Plato and Aristotle, as the true teaching. At present very few will be prepared to accept his basic premise. But it is safe to predict that the movement which his book may be said to launch in this country will become increasingly influential and weighty as the years go by. However one may have to judge of his thesis, or of his book, the question that underlies his book, and to which his thesis is an answer, goes farther to the roots of the problems of the social sciences than any other question of which I am aware that has been publicly raised in recent times.

That question concerns the legitimacy of the modern approach in all its forms, as distinguished from the classical approach. It revives, after more than a century of silence, the issue which is known as *la querelle des anciens et des modernes* and which is generally supposed to have been settled, if not by Newton and Rousseau, at any rate by Hegel. Wild's book shows certainly that this apparently obsolete issue has again become a question. Indeed, only those who rush in where sensible men would fear to tread will claim that it has already found, or could yet have found, a sufficient answer. We are barely beginning to realize the

¹ John Wild. *Plato's Theory of Man. An Introduction to the Realistic Philosophy of Culture.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1946. x & 320 pp. \$5.

bearing and the extent of its implications. In Wild's book this underlying question is what must command the most serious attention of every social scientist who does not wish to be, or to be called, an obscurantist.

The test of extreme severity which modern civilization is undergoing before our eyes on the plane of action is accompanied by an increasingly insistent attack of a theoretical character on the principles of modern civilization. This attack cannot be met by a mere defense. Defensibility is not truth. The world abounds with defensible positions that are irreconcilable with one another. To limit oneself to the defense of a position means to claim the advantages of prescription; but one cannot enjoy those advantages without exposing oneself to the reasonable suspicion that one is defending a vested interest of some kind or another which does not bear being looked into by an impartial third. To claim the advantages of prescription is particularly unbecoming for the adherents of the modern principles—principles that are inseparable from the demand for the liberation of one's mind from all prejudices. The very resolution to defend a position may be said to entail the loss of a most important freedom, a freedom the exercise of which was responsible for the success of the modern venture: defenders cannot afford radically to doubt. Adherents of the modern principles who lack the ability to take a critical distance from the modern principles, to look at those principles not from their habitual point of view but from the point of view of their opponents, have already admitted defeat: they show by their action that theirs is a dogmatic adherence to an established position.

Thus the only answer to the attack on the modern principles which is legitimate on the basis of those principles themselves is their free and impartial reexamination. The method of such a reexamination is predetermined by the nature of the modern principles. They were evolved in opposition to, and by way of transformation of, the principles of classical philosophy. Up to the present day no adherent of the modern principles has been

able to assert them with any degree of definiteness without explicitly and more or less passionately attacking the classical principles. Therefore a free examination of the modern principles is necessarily based on their conscientious confrontation with those of classical philosophy.

To confront them with the principles of mediaeval philosophy would not suffice. Generally speaking, mediaeval philosophy has in common with modern philosophy the fact that both are influenced, if in different ways, by the teaching of the Bible. That influence does not necessarily become a subject of critical investigation if modern philosophy is confronted with mediaeval philosophy, whereas it necessarily comes immediately to the center of attention if modern philosophy is confronted with classical philosophy. Besides, it was classical rather than mediaeval philosophy which was attacked by the founders of modern philosophy. At any rate, the founders of modern political philosophy conceived of their work as directed against classical philosophy in all its forms; in the passages of their writings where they state their intention most clearly they do not even mention mediaeval philosophy as a significant opponent.²

It would be a mistake to believe that the principles to be confronted with each other, especially those of classical philosophy, are readily accessible in the works of the historians of philosophy. The modern students of classical philosophy are modern men, and hence they almost inevitably approach classical philosophy from a modern point of view. Only if the study of classical philosophy were accompanied by constant and relentless reflection on the modern principles, and hence by liberation from the naive acceptance of those principles, could there be any prospect of an adequate understanding of classical philosophy by modern men. One may seriously doubt whether there is a single study which fully meets this indispensable requirement. A sign of this is the

² See Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chs. 14 and 15 (compare *Discorsi* I, Introd. and ch. 58); Bodin, *Six livres de la république*, preface; Hobbes, *De cive*, XII 3 (compare preface), and *Leviathan*, ch. 21 (p. 113 Everyman's Library edition).

fact that one rarely, if ever, comes across studies on classical philosophy which do not make ample use of modern terminology, and thus continually introduce non-classical thoughts into what claim to be exact presentations of classical philosophy.

Until a relatively short time ago most students of earlier philosophy started from the assumption that modern philosophy is decisively superior to classical philosophy. Accordingly they were compelled to try to understand classical philosophy better than it understood itself, that is, they were prevented from wholeheartedly complying with the demand of genuine historical understanding or of historical exactness according to which one has to try to understand the thinkers of the past exactly as they understood themselves. It is obvious that one's understanding of the thought of the past will tend to be the more adequate the more one is interested in the thought of the past; but one cannot be seriously interested in it, cannot be driven to it by philosophic passion, if one knows beforehand that the thought of the present is decisively superior to that of the past.

This is confirmed by the generally accepted view that "the historical school," in the wide sense of the term, brought about a better historical understanding and a keener awareness of the demands of historical exactness than was available in the philosophy of the eighteenth century: these "romantics" did not believe in the *essential* superiority of their time to the past. The fusion of philosophic and historical interest which we can observe especially around the year 1800 in Germany, and out of which the modern study of classical philosophy grew, was animated by a "longing of the soul" for classical antiquity. Both the greatness and the failings of modern understanding of classical philosophy can be traced to those fateful years: one would only delude oneself by believing that the fundamental thoughts of such men as Friedrich Schlegel and Hegel have ceased to be the philosophic basis of our understanding of the classics merely because a large number of their individual assertions have been rejected by their followers or opponents. These thinkers, guided by Schiller's

distinction between naive and sentimental poetry, conceived of the thought of the classics as "naive," that is, as related to life directly, and for this reason lacking the "reflection" of the modern "self-consciousness." Therefore, however much their historical understanding may have surpassed that of the Enlightenment, their final judgment on the respective merits of modern and classical philosophy coincided with that of their predecessors, since at least from the point of view of philosophy the shortcomings of naivete are much more serious than its advantages. The view prevailed, and is still prevalent, in spite of or because of the discovery of "history," that classical philosophy did not raise the truly fundamental questions of a "reflexive" character which concern "subjectivity," and which were raised with increasing clarity in the course of the modern development.

The average historian of our time is a spiritual descendant not so much of Hegel himself as of nineteenth-century historicism. Historicism assumes that all periods are equally "immediate" to "the truth," and hence it refuses to judge the thought of the past with reference to "the truth" of our time. Its intention is to understand the thought, say, of Plato exactly as Plato understood it himself, or to interpret Plato's statements with a view to the center of reference not of modern thought but of his own thought. It is constitutionally unable, however, to live up to its intention. It assumes that, generally speaking and other things being equal, the thought of all epochs is equally "true," because every philosophy is essentially the expression of its time,³ and it makes this assumption the basis of its interpretation of classical philosophy. But classical philosophy, which claimed to teach *the* truth, and not merely the truth of classical Greece, cannot be

³ According to a view that is very popular today, the historicist thesis can be proved by historical evidence: historical evidence is said to prove that all philosophic teachings are "relative" to their "times." Even if this were so, nothing would follow from it, since the "relatedness" of a teaching to its "time" is essentially ambiguous and does not necessarily mean dependence of the teaching on its "time"; a particular time may have been particularly favorable to the discovery of *the* truth.

understood on the basis of this assumption. By rejecting the claim of the classics as untenable, if not as simply absurd, historicism asserts just as much as did the Enlightenment and German idealism that the modern approach (for historicism is admittedly characteristically modern) is decisively superior to the classical approach. Historicism supplies as little as other modern schools a philosophic motive for the genuinely historical effort to understand classical philosophy in exactly the same way as it understood itself.

To understand classical philosophy one must be seriously interested in it, must take it as seriously as possible. But one cannot do this if one is not prepared to consider the possibility that its teachings are simply true, or that it is decisively superior to modern philosophy. No prejudice in favor of cherished modern convictions must deter the historian from giving the thinkers of old the full benefit of the doubt. When he engages in the study of classical philosophy he must cease to take his bearings by the modern signposts with which he has grown familiar since his early childhood; he must learn to take his bearings by the signposts that guided the classical philosophers. Those old signposts are not immediately visible; they are concealed by heaps of dust and rubble. The most obvious, although not by any means the most dangerous, impediments to genuine understanding of the classics are the superficial interpretations which are offered in textbooks and many monographs and which seem to unlock by one formula the mystery of classical philosophy. The signposts that guided the classics must be recovered before they can be used. Before the historian has succeeded in recovering them he cannot help being in a condition of utter bewilderment: he finds himself in a darkness that is illumined only by his knowledge that he knows, that is, understands, nothing. When he engages in the study of classical philosophy he must know that he embarks on a journey whose end is completely hidden from him. He is not likely to return to the shores of our time as exactly the same man who departed from them.

Our lack of an adequate interpretation of classical philosophy is due to the lack of a philosophic incentive to such an interpretation. This lack is now filled for the first time in a number of generations by insight into the necessity for a free reexamination of the modern principles, a reexamination that necessarily presupposes an adequate understanding of classical philosophy. What at first sight is merely the result of the demands of historical exactness is actually the result of the demand for a philosophic reexamination of our basic assumptions. This being the case, insistence on the fundamental difference between philosophy and history—a difference by which philosophy stands or falls—may very well, in the present situation, be misleading, not to say dangerous to philosophy itself.

II

On the basis of this discussion of the standard with reference to which present-day books on classical philosophy ought to be judged, we may turn now to Wild's book on Plato's doctrine of man. It is evident at once that for Wild himself, whatever doubts may be entertained by some of his readers, *la querelle des anciens et des modernes* no longer exists. He considers it definitely settled in favor of the classics. After having disposed of this fundamental question, which as such is a theoretical question, he can pursue a practical or political intention on the foundation of the classical teaching.

This leads to dangerous consequences. The teaching of the classics can have no immediate practical effect, because present-day society is not a *polis*. It does not suffice to say that man is always man and that there is no other difference between modern society and the society envisaged by the classics than that the former is more "complex" than the latter, or that the difference between them is only one of size; for even if this were true, the classics themselves regarded size as of crucial importance for determining the character of a society. To be somewhat more specific, it is true that what Plato teaches us about tyranny is

indispensable for the understanding of present-day "totalitarianism," but one would misunderstand that contemporary phenomenon by simply identifying it with the tyranny of old; it suffices here to remark that present-day "totalitarianism" is essentially based on "ideologies," and ultimately on popularized or distorted science, whereas ancient tyranny did not have such a basis. Since there are essential differences between modern society and the society envisaged by the classics, the classical teaching cannot be immediately applicable to modern society, but has to be *made* applicable to it, that is, must be modernized or distorted.

Wild is not unaware of the danger to which he exposes himself. He opens his book with the following declaration: "This book is not an attempt to expound the whole of Plato's philosophy, nor even of a single part of his philosophy, as 'historic' exposition is often understood. Its aim is not so much to reveal the thought of Plato as to reveal the nature of human culture and its inversion, using Plato, the philosopher, as a guide. Though such a purpose may seem strange to a certain version of history as antiquarian research, I am sure that it would not seem strange to Plato." Certainly, Plato considered the philosophic question of the best political order infinitely more important than the historical question of what this or that individual thought of the best political order; hence he never wrote a book on other people's "theories of man." But it is equally certain that he would have preferred an adequate historical investigation to an inadequate philosophic investigation: "it is better to finish a little task well than a great one inadequately."

Wild would have come nearer to the spirit of Plato's unconcern with, or even contempt for, the merely historical truth if he had expounded his own "philosophy of culture" in his own name, or if, following the example of Sir Thomas More, he had written a free imitation of the *Republic*, that is, if he had taken the responsibility for a teaching which is actually his own teaching and not sought refuge behind the shield of Plato's dazzling authority.

Nothing would have prevented him from pointing out on every occasion how much he had learned from Plato.

By embarking on the un-Platonic venture of writing a book on Plato's "theory of man" he has forfeited every right to appeal to Plato's sovereign disregard for historical truth and must bow to the standards of historical exactness. His failure to submit to these standards, combined with his failure to write a non-historical book on the "theory of man" or "the realistic philosophy of culture," merely leads to the result that he is not compelled really to prove his most important assertions. It exposes him to the danger of substituting for proof of the historical contention that Plato held certain views some sort of philosophic reasoning showing that the views in question are sound, and of substituting for the demonstration of philosophic theses references to Platonic passages where those theses are asserted. For instance, he obviously believes in the necessity and possibility of a natural theology; ⁴ since he writes a book on Plato he can leave it at referring to Platonic passages in which it is presupposed, or demonstrated, that the existence of God is knowable to unassisted theoretical reason, and he is not compelled squarely to set forth a demonstration of the existence of God.

Wild's refusal to expound the whole of Plato's "theory of man" is irreconcilable with his view that our disasters are due to rejection of the classical teaching; for if this view is sound, one has to recover the classical teaching as a whole before one can even think of selecting parts from it. Prior to such complete recovery every selection is arbitrary, having no other principle than modern predilections. If it is true that *la querelle des anciens et des modernes* is the paramount issue, one merely blurs that issue by substituting for a downright modern teaching a modernized Platonic teaching.

For the reasons indicated, Wild is compelled to assume that we can find in the classical teaching the solution to our modern problem. Our problem is caused by the insufficiency of modern philos-

⁴ Wild, pp. 11, 30, 109, 220, 229, 290, 292.

ophy. Hence the classics must be presumed to supply us with an analysis, diagnosis and therapy of the modern disease. Wild opposes the "realism" of classical philosophy to the "idealism" of modern philosophy, and he asserts that "idealism" is identical with the phenomenon characterized by Plato as sophistry.⁵

The temptation to identify modern philosophy with sophistry is considerable, and Wild is not the first to succumb to it. But can that identification be maintained in cold blood? German idealism, against which Wild's attack is primarily directed, was always inclined to conceive of its relation to the philosophy of the Enlightenment as analogous to the relation of classical philosophy to the Greek sophists. As a matter of fact, one sometimes has the impression that Wild merely replaces the thesis "sophistry is to classical philosophy as Enlightenment is to German idealism" by the thesis "sophistry is to classical philosophy as German idealism is to Wild." The truth is, however, that whereas German idealism never lost sight of the fundamental difference between modern thought in all its forms and classical thought in all its forms, Wild rests satisfied with the unqualified identification of idealism *tout court*—and hence in particular modern idealism, German and non-German—with sophistry. If his contentions on this point were to be taken seriously he would have had to limit himself to asserting that sophistry is the remote, indirect and unintentional, if necessary, consequence of the fundamentally unsophistical and genuinely philosophic effort of modern philosophy, and he would have had to take the trouble of submitting some non-rhetorical and non-sophistical proof of this very far-reaching assertion.⁶

⁵ Wild, pp. 4 ff., 12 ff., 21, 234, 249, 254, 271, 301, 304, 310 ff.

⁶ Wild mentions the following characteristic traits of "idealism": the subordination of ontology to logic (p. 2); the denial of the intentionality of thought (280 n., 301); the view "that all things are constantly thinking, or that there are unconscious or non-thinking thoughts" (214); the confusion of material things with the forms, the objects of thought, and hence the denial of matter, motion and change (5, 234, 238, 290). His last word on the subject is the identification of idealism with "the confusion of man with the creator" (311), that is, with the view that all meaning, order and truth are originated by, or relative to, "consciousness." "reason," "the

The difficulties to which the identification of idealism with sophistry is exposed are sufficiently illustrated by Wild's own hesitations. On the one hand, he unqualifiedly identifies idealism with sophistry (311); on the other hand he asserts that idealism is the root of sophistry (271, 279 ff., 79), and hence that it is different from sophistry. He exonerates idealism still more by intimating that it is only one of the roots of sophistry. The root of sophistry is said to be "transcendental confusion," and certain "transcendental confusions" lead to errors different from idealism which also lead to sophistry (229 ff., 234, 297). But even "transcendental confusion" is not necessarily *the* root of sophistry, for while it is called on one occasion "the ultimate root of sophistry" (232), on another occasion it is said to "lie close to the root of sophistry" (238). We are thus gradually led to the view that "transcendental confusion" may lead to idealism as well as to other heresies, and that idealism as well as other errors may lead to sophistry—a view that is plausible, if not very enlightening, since even truth itself can be sophistically misused (273).

To this Wild might conceivably answer as follows: "transcendental confusion" is an "active tendency" which, following its own law, leads to an extreme beyond which "sophistry can go no further," in other words, to the position of Protagoras, "the original sophist par excellence" (239); and Protagoras' position is idealism (239, 254, 306). But—to say nothing of the fact that, according to what he says elsewhere, sophistry *can* go beyond Protagoras, that is, toward "unmitigated naturalism" (254)—it is

subject," "man" or *Existenz*. (Compare E. Husserl, *Ideen*, §§ 47, 49, 55, and M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, § 44, as well as "Vom Wesen des Grundes" in *Festschrift für Edmund Husserl*, Halle 1929, pp. 98 ff. I refer to Husserl and Heidegger because they most clearly reveal that Wild's identification of idealism with the denial of intentionality or with the subordination of ontology to logic does not go to the root of the matter.)

Wild's position is at least as much opposed to English empiricism, for example, as it is to German idealism. Yet he has chosen to present German idealism as *the* villain. A man who claims to be a Platonist is under an obligation to stress the fact that German idealism attempted to restore important elements of Plato's and Aristotle's teaching in opposition to western (English and French) philosophy, if on the basis of a foundation laid by western philosophy.

hard to understand how one can treat the "idealism" of Protagoras and the "idealism" of Kant, Hegel or Husserl as fundamentally identical. In other words, one definitely goes beyond the limits of legitimate polemical excitement by identifying modern philosophic idealism with sophistry and thus implying that men like Kant or Husserl were "subjective deceivers," that they were "submitting to the sensory bias of [their audience] . . . and careless of the truth," and that, "with a little argumentative skill and persuasive capacity" they were making out "an original theory" to "look at least as good as the truth, if not a great deal better" (284, 310; the last quotations are taken from passages explicitly dealing with the essence of sophistry). To express the same criticism somewhat less harshly, Wild has considerable success in the rhetorical feat of rousing the reader's wrath against the scoundrels who are guilty of "transcendental confusion" or "transcendental carelessness" (297), but he does not completely convince one that ordinary confusion or ordinary carelessness is necessarily the outcome of too concentrated contemplation of "transcendental agencies" (298).

To see how Wild arrives at his surprising assertion one merely has to compare what he considers to be the essence of sophistry with the most characteristic trait of modern idealism. Sophistry, he asserts, is essentially the construction of "theories," "systems" or "ideal replicas" of reality, whereas philosophy "gives itself entirely to the task of hunting [reality] as it already is" (280, 308, 310). Modern idealism explicitly conceives of being as "constructed" or "constituted" by, or otherwise dependent on, the spontaneity of the "subject"; in its "classical" form, at any rate, it was based on the view that we can genuinely understand only what we "make" or "construct." But is there not all the difference in the world between constructing "subjective theories" because one denies that there is a fundamental difference between science and opinion or sense perception (sophistry), and constructing "ideal" "models" because one holds that only such construction makes possible science, as distinguished from opinion or

sense perception (modern idealism)? Modern idealism is so far from being identical with or even akin to sophistry, in Wild's sense of the term, that it stands or falls by the Platonic-Aristotelian distinction between science and opinion or sense perception.

Wild's inability to do justice to modern philosophy⁷ is due to his failure to give serious consideration to the question why modern philosophy revolted against the classical tradition, in other words, to the difficulties to which classical philosophy was and is still exposed. According to the classics, science presupposes that the world is intelligible, and this, Plato and Aristotle held, is impossible if intelligence does not "rule" the world. Classical science, one may say in order to simplify the discussion, ultimately depends on the possibility of natural theology as a science (compare Wild, 258). It was especially due to the influence of the Bible that the classical view became questionable, even for many of its adherents. Certainly the final form of classical science, that is, Aristotelian science (11, 17, 292), stands or falls by the doctrine of the eternity of the visible universe, a doctrine diametrically opposed to the Biblical doctrine of creation. One would have to have the courage to call Luther and Calvin sophists before one could dare to assert that only sophists can question the satisfactory character of the reconciliation attempted by Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas between the Biblical and the Aristotelian teachings. Wild, however, barely alludes to the Reformation when speaking of the origins of the modern break with classical philosophy. At any rate a case could be made for the view that it was reflection guided by the Biblical notion of creation which ultimately led to the doctrine that the world as created by God, or the "thing-in-itself," is inaccessible to human knowledge, or to the idealistic assertion that the world as far as we can under-

⁷ A further example: "This mysterious mistrust of universal knowledge is identified by Plato as the source of social corruption. . . . It is visible now in the sharp separation of 'the theoretical' from 'the practical' which stems from Kant" (122). The author obviously did not consider Kant's "Über den Gemeinspruch: Das mag in der Theorie richtig sein, taugt aber nicht für die Praxis." He must have mistaken Kant for Burke.

stand it, that is, the world as studied by human science, must be the "work" of the human mind.⁸

Be this as it may, in reading Wild's book one suddenly realizes the value of that textbook version of the primary motivation of modern philosophy which, if memory is a trustworthy guide, starts from the well-known fact that the difficulties to which classical philosophy is exposed find today their most massive expression in the success of modern natural science. Wild seems to believe that he can reject modern philosophy while he does not dare to reject modern science. He certainly makes the most naive use of the fairly recent distinction between philosophy and science (78 ff. and 200 ff.) without considering that there is no place for this distinction in classical philosophy or science.⁹ He thus tacitly assumes that modern "science" can be reconciled with, or integrated into, classical "philosophy." But he does not give one the slightest notion of how this could be achieved. Or does he believe that one can bridge the gulf between the "evolutionism" of modern biology and Aristotle's basic doctrine of the eternity of the species by triumphantly pronouncing that "classical philosophy [was] in Aristotle and Aquinas, and, indeed, universally before the decay of modern scholasticism . . . indubitably and incurably in its treatment of nature an evolutionary philosophy" (5)? Whatever may be the limitations of modern natural science, its obvious success has brought about a situation in which the possibility of natural theology has lost all the evidence it formerly possessed, and a much more serious reflection than Wild deems necessary would be required for checking "irresponsible, sophistic speculation" (79) about natural theology, to say nothing of what would be required for restoring it as a genuine science.

⁸ See Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. by Vorländer, p. 131, and *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, §§ 84 ff.; Hobbes, *De corpore*, xxv 1, *De homine*, x 4-5, and *Leviathan*, chs. 37 and 31; also Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, pp. 88, 94 ff., 132 ff. (Everyman's Library edition), and Descartes, *Meditationes*, 1.

⁹ In speaking of the Platonic distinction between mathematics and dialectics Wild identifies *dianoia* with "scientific insight" and *noesis* with "philosophic insight" (189, 197 ff.), thus contradicting what Plato clearly says in the *Republic* (533 c-d; compare *Seventh Letter*, 342 a-b).

In order to maintain the thesis that modern idealism is identical with sophistry Wild has not merely to disregard completely the fundamental issue involved in the conflict between modern and classical philosophy, and to misinterpret modern philosophy; he is also compelled to misinterpret the Platonic doctrine of sophistry. According to his interpretation of the *Sophist*, Plato saw the essence of sophistry (as distinguished from philosophy, which is the "reproduction" of the truth) in the "production" of "artificial constructions" and "novel theories and original speculations" or "systems," and in "productive" or "creative" thinking "about the most general and the most important things" (280 ff., 304 ff., 308). Plato does not, of course, say anything about "novel theories," "original speculations" or "systems." What he does say in the "vital discussion" (279) of the essence of sophistry¹⁰ is that sophistry is the production in speech of inexact imitations of all things, or the reproduction in spoken images of the apparent proportions of reality.

Wild himself virtually admits (281 ff.) that sophistry thus understood is as much and as little "productive" or "creative" as philosophy itself, which in the same context (*Sophist*, 235 d1 to 236 c7) is possibly hinted to be the production in speech of exact imitations of what is, or the reproduction in spoken images of the true proportions of reality. Even if it is granted that philosophy cannot be described in precise language as the production of exact imitations of reality, one would still not be entitled to say that according to Plato sophistry is essentially the production in speech of inexact imitations of the most important things; for, to say nothing of other considerations, the sophist shares this trait, according to Plato, not only with the popular orator but above

¹⁰ In the "preliminary" discussion (*Sophist*, 221 c5 to 231 e) the Eleatic stranger mentions the fact that the sophist might "make" the doctrines he sells, but he makes it quite clear that it is irrelevant whether the sophist "makes" his doctrines himself or has them supplied by others (224 e2). It is the young Theaetetus, who has never seen a sophist (239 e1; compare *Meno*, 92 b7 ff.), who stresses the "productive" character of sophistry (231 d9-11). Whatever this may mean, the Eleatic stranger states shortly afterward that this aspect of sophistry is certainly not the most characteristic one (232 b3-6; compare 233 c10-d2).

all with many simpleminded "men in the street"¹¹ and indeed (since mere diffidence in one's opinions about the whole does not liberate one from the spell of those opinions) with all non-philosophers as such.¹² Nor does one render Plato's thesis correctly by suggesting that the sophist is responsible for, or is the first originator of, the "fancies" of other men, since Plato makes it quite clear that the "fancies" which the sophist defends, elaborates or destroys originate with an entirely different type.¹³

If the construction of "theories" were sophistry every erring philosopher who as such substitutes a "theory" of his own for the truth would be a sophist. Wild is consistent enough to use "sophistry" and "false philosophy" as synonymous terms (64, 232, 234). But this is certainly not the Platonic view. In a passage of the *Theaetetus* (172 c3 ff.) which is taken by Wild to deal with the opposition between philosophy and sophistry (254) Thales, who from Plato's point of view doubtless held a "false philosophy," is mentioned as a representative of the philosophic attitude. If Wild were right the designation of sophist would belong not only to the venerable Parmenides,¹⁴ who identified the One with "a spatial whole" which he "imagined" (221 ff.) and who "committed acosmism," "absolutism" and "pantheism," but to Plato himself, whose "dynamic ontology" ("a brilliant and fertile suggestion") suffers from the "confusion of logic with ontology" (292, 296), and

¹¹ Compare *Sophist*, 268 a-c, with *Apologia Socratis*, 22 d7.

¹² To avoid this difficulty Wild suggests that "just as all men are philosophers, and Socrates is the typical man, so are all men also sophists" (275). From this it would follow that Socrates, too, is a sophist, and not the opposite of the sophist, as suggested elsewhere (38, 306). Besides, the whole argument of the *Sophist*, and even of Wild's book, presupposes that the sophist is a specific human type distinguished not only from the philosopher but from the orator, the hunter, the tyrant, the lover, the statesman, the painter, the merchant and so on. This is not to deny that Plato sometimes uses "sophist" in a much wider sense; but this wider sense as such is not the precise sense. The common man is a "sophist" in almost the same sense in which the bricklayer or the shoemaker is a "scientist" (see *Statesman*, 258 c6-e7, and *Theaetetus*, 146 d1-2).

¹³ *Republic*, 493 a6-9; *Statesman*, 303 b8-c5.

¹⁴ Wild's statements on pp. 128 ff. imply that Heraclitus, Parmenides and other great men were sophists.

even to Aristotle, who denied the creation of the world and hence the creator (311). Hardly anyone, except perhaps some theologians, would escape that fate.

According to the classical view sophistry is not false philosophy but a particular mode of the absence of philosophy, or, to speak somewhat more exactly, the use of philosophy for non-philosophic purposes by men who might be expected to know better, that is, who are somehow aware of the superiority of philosophy to all other pursuits. What characterizes the sophist is neither the construction of "original theories," of which all pre-Socratics and the author of the *Timaeus* were at least as guilty as the modern philosophers, nor, on the other hand, self-complacent scepticism, but the purpose for which he uses his "constructive" or "destructive" speeches.¹⁵

Since he believes that the sophist is the originator of the most fundamental errors (305, 118, 121) Wild is driven to assert that sophistry is *the* "inversion" of philosophy: "of all the modes of ignorance surely that of the sophist . . . is the most formidable" (278, 305). According to Plato there are at least two equally "formidable" vices, diametrically opposed to philosophy and to

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1355 b17-22, and *Metaphysics*, 1004 b22-26. The view outlined above is confirmed by a comparison of Callicles (in the *Gorgias*) with the sophists. Callicles is not a sophist, as Wild implies (38, 306), but a despiser of sophistry, and he is this precisely because he is not in any way aware of the superiority of philosophy, or wisdom, to all other pursuits. While he is thus more opposed to Socrates than are Gorgias and Polos, he is on the other hand nearer to Socrates than are Gorgias and Polos, because he and Socrates are "lovers" (compare *Gorgias*, 481 d1-5, with *Sophist*, 222 d7 ff.). Socrates and Callicles are passionately given to the pursuit of what they consider best (to philosophy and politics, respectively), but the sophist's pursuit of philosophy is lukewarm, because he is passionately concerned with pleasures other than those deriving from understanding, or from understanding in common (true friendship), and especially with the pleasures deriving from "prestige." Wild's failure to distinguish between the "Callicles" type and the "sophist" type underlies also his interpretation of *Republic* 487 b to 497 a (121-31). He gratuitously assumes that passages refer to sophists which unmistakably refer to politicians. In the same context he also erroneously identifies the sophist with the half-philosopher, or the man who, though lacking the necessary natural gifts and destined by nature for the humbler arts, devotes himself to the study of philosophy (compare *Republic*, 495 d7, with *Phaedrus*, 245 a7).

each other: sophistry and the self-satisfied stupidity of the ignorant, who mistakes his opinions for knowledge (*Sophist*, 267 e10 ff. and 229 c), as Wild himself on one occasion almost openly admits (128). The opposition of these two vices to each other permits the philosopher, and even compels him, to fight the one with the other: against the sophistic contempt for "commonsense" he appeals to the truth divined by "commonsense," and against the popular satisfaction with "commonsense" he allies himself with the sophistic doubt of it.¹⁶ By insisting onesidedly on the opposition between the philosopher and the sophist one blurs the equally fundamental opposition between the philosopher and the "unsophisticated" non-philosopher, and thus is finally led to make the thoroughly un-Platonic assertion that "all men are philosophers" (275). While in one sense the sophist is *the* antagonist of the philosopher, in another sense the non-sophistic non-philosopher is *the* antagonist: the sophist, as distinguished from the vulgar, may be the "friend" of the philosopher.¹⁷

Sophistry (in the Platonic sense), far from being something like original sin, as Wild makes it out to be (305 ff., 311, 169), is, from the philosophic point of view, play or childish amusement; and the sophist, far from being the evil one or his emissary, is rather to be characterized as a man of mature age who has never grown up.¹⁸ As Plato shows by the more trustworthy "deed" rather than by "speech"—by his *demonstratio ad oculos* of sophists, especially in the *Protagoras* and the *Euthydemus*—sophistry, from the philosophic point of view, is strictly speaking ridiculous, and what is ridiculous is a harmless deformity.¹⁹ And if the objection is

¹⁶ See *Sophist*, 239 e5 to 240 a2; *Theaetetus*, 196 e1 to 197 a4; *Protagoras*, 352 b2 to 353 a; *Republic*, 538 e5–6. Wild, who does not always say the same things about the same topics (*Gorgias*, 490 e9–11), almost says on one occasion (99) what I said above in contradicting his predominant sentiment. See also his remark (167) that "the public tyrant," and hence not the sophist, "is the most inverted . . . of men."

¹⁷ *Republic*, 498 c9–d1; *Apologia Socratis*, 23 d4–7; *Phaedo*, 64 b1–6; *Laws*, 821 a2 ff.; *Hippias maior*, 285 b5–c2.

¹⁸ *Sophist*, 234 a–b, 239 d5, 259 c1–d7. Compare *Parmenides*, 128 d6–e2, and *Republic*, 539 b2–d2.

¹⁹ *Philebus*, 49 b5–c5; Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449 a34–37.

made that Socrates warns the young Hippocrates against the dangers which might threaten him at the hands of Protagoras, the answer is obvious that Socrates also warns Protagoras against the dangers threatening him at the hands of that fool and son of a fool, Hippocrates, and his like, and that what is dangerous to the "Hippocrates" type is not necessarily dangerous to others.²⁰ The unintelligent indignation about sophists which Wild imputes to Socrates is characteristic not of Socrates but of the men who persecuted and killed him.²¹

It is in obvious contrast to a teaching to which Plato adhered to the last—that all vice and all wrongdoing are ultimately involuntary, because they proceed from ignorance (*Laws*, 731 c2–7 and 860 c7–d1)—that Wild traces sophistry, "the greatest evil," to something like wilful ignorance (306). The ultimate reason why he believes that sophistry is essentially "creative thought" or "false philosophy" or the "inversion" of philosophy, would seem to be that he reads Plato in the spirit not of Plato but of the Bible. He identifies the sophist with "the maker of an idol,"²² and sophistry with the "vain philosophy" and "science falsely so called" of the Epistle to the Colossians and the First Epistle to Timothy. In his presentation sophistry takes on all the colors of idolatry, which is "the cause, the beginning and the end of all sin," and of infidelity, which has its root in pride.

Lest the foregoing remarks be misunderstood, it must be said that they apply only partly to any attempt to interpret Platonic philosophy in Biblical terms. While all such attempts are extremely questionable, there is no necessity whatever that they be made in the particular manner which Wild has chosen, both

²⁰ *Protagoras*, 316 c2–5 and 319 b1–c1 (compare *ibid.*, 310 c3–4, with *Republic*, 549 e3 to 550 a1); *Theaetetus*, 151 b2–6; *Republic*, 492 a5–8; *Meno*, 91 e2 to 92 a2.

²¹ *Meno*, 91 c1–5; compare *Republic*, 536 c2–7.

²² Wild, 284 (also 81): "the maker of an idol (*eidolon*).\" Unfortunately Plato, in the passage to which Wild refers as well as elsewhere in the *Sophist* (235 b8 to 236 c7, 264 c4–5, 265 b1, 266 d7–8, 268 c9–d1) uses *eidolon* to designate the genus which embraces both "replicas" (the products of the philosopher) and "fancies" (the products of the sophist, among others). See especially 266 b2–c6, where Plato speaks of the "idols" made by God.

in his presentation of Plato's philosophy and in his criticism of modern philosophy. That particular manner has as little Biblical support as it has philosophic support.

III

The contention that we can find in classical teaching the solution to our problem is exposed to a further difficulty, caused by what one may well call "the fundamental opposition of Plato and Aristotle." To justify his enterprise Wild has to assert that there is a fundamental harmony between the two philosophies. He admits that there is a certain "contrast" between them: Plato "is always tending to regard things from a practical or moral point of view, while Aristotle is always tending to regard things from the detached theoretical point of view." But he holds that this "contrast" merely represents "two distinct though inseparable phases of one and the same philosophy."

According to Wild, Plato's answers are more elaborate or more satisfactory than Aristotle's in regard to practical philosophy, and the opposite is true in regard to theoretical philosophy (6, 11, 16 ff., 22, 42). In discussing Plato's theoretical philosophy he follows in the main the school of interpretation which asserts that Plato in his "later" dialogues abandoned the "separation" of ideas and sensible things, and thus adopted a "dynamic" view fundamentally different from the "static" view expounded in the "earlier" dialogues, as well as in Aristotle's reports (215 ff., 233 ff., 289 ff.). Wild is unable to prove his contention because he states the crucial Platonic theses from the beginning in Aristotelian terms (if not in scholastic or modern terms), and thus understands Plato's answers as answers to the questions not of Plato but of Aristotle; that is to say, he begs the question.

It is reasonable to suspect that Plato does not supply his readers with explicit or final answers to his most important questions; but this does not entitle one to insert into Plato's argument Aristotle's explicit and final answers, as Wild constantly does (199, 223, 225, 245, 267 ff., 287, 290 ff.), before one has carefully con-

sidered, and excluded by sound reasoning, the possibility that Plato's tentative answers point in an entirely different direction from that chosen by Aristotle. Wild has failed to consider that possibility. If one cannot leave it at what Plato explicitly said, one has to consider first of all, and with the utmost care, Aristotle's reports about Plato's teaching, which go considerably beyond the evidence supplied by Plato's writings. Wild barely alludes to those reports.

That Wild is seeking in a false direction for the answer to Plato's central question can perhaps most easily be seen from the following example. One of the few passages on which Wild bases his thesis regarding Plato's "dynamic ontology" is *Sophist*, 247 e, where "being" is tentatively defined as "power," although he considers that definition "an undeveloped suggestion" or "a sort of stopgap" (291 ff.). In interpreting the context of that passage ("criticism of materialism and idealism") he asserts that the "materialists" and "idealists" really tried to define being, whereas the "pluralists" and the "monists," whose views are discussed by Plato immediately before, "merely took being for granted as obvious" (285, 288). But Plato makes it quite clear that he considers the "pluralists" and the "monists" more exact than the "materialists" and the "idealists" (*Sophist*, 245 e6-8, 242 c4-6), that is, that he believes the two former groups to take less for granted than the two latter ones. Wild had to disregard this crucial information in order to enhance the significance of the tentative definition of being as power. The reason for Plato's statement is that, in his opinion, one does not raise the question of being at all if one does not raise it in terms of the question "one and many."²³

²³ Fundamentally the same misunderstanding underlies Wild's assertion, allegedly based on *Statesman* 284 e to 285, that "in the lower arts which deal with physical things, . . . measurement takes a quantitative form, as in building and stone-cutting," whereas "in the higher arts, which deal with non-physical structures (as education for example), measurement is qualitative, and the work is measured by the 'mean,' the 'fit' . . . It is a great mistake to suppose that these latter arts are therefore less 'exact' than those subject to quantitative measurement" (47). Plato states explicitly that the art of weaving, nay, that all arts have to measure their

It would seem that in order to prove a basic agreement between Plato and Aristotle the most important thing to do would be to show that both admitted either the supremacy of theory or that of practice or morality. Wild, however, believes that there cannot be an unqualified supremacy of either: "the practical is the richer and more inclusive order, whereas the theoretical is the higher and more determining order" (25). This is neither the Platonic nor the Aristotelian view. If it is assumed that according to Plato wisdom is essentially practical (*phronesis*), or the idea of the good ("the highest object of learning") is essentially practical (30), it is necessary to say that according to Plato the practical order is the highest order. As concerns Aristotle, he leaves not the slightest doubt that theory, to him, is absolutely superior in dignity to practice, or that he regards the practical or moral order (25 ff.) as very far from including the theoretical order.²⁴

work by the mean or the fit (*Statesman*, 284 a5-b3 and d4-6), and that the art of building is more exact than music, the most important part of the art of education (*Philebus*, 56 c4-6; *Republic*, 376 e2-4).

²⁴ See *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141 a18 ff., 1177 a17 ff., 1178 b7 ff. Since Wild's assertion that "wisdom or philosophy" must be "both theoretical and practical" (17, 76) is based largely on Thomas' *Summa theologiae*, one may also refer to the latter, 2,2 q.45 a.3 and q.19 a.7, where it is made clear that according to philosophy wisdom is purely theoretical, whereas according to theology wisdom is both theoretical and practical; and to 1,2 q.58 a.4-5, where it is made clear that moral virtue and wisdom (in the philosophic sense) are perfectly independent of each other.

Wild's assertion that the practical or moral order is more inclusive than the theoretical order would seem to be based on this syllogism: the practical order comprises all objects of action; but action consists of theory and of action proper; hence the practical order comprises all objects of theory and all objects of action proper (compare Wild, 23). Wild obviously mistakes theory as a way of life, which as such is an object of choice or action, for the objects of theory, which as such are not objects of choice or action. The same mistake underlies his assertion that according to Aristotle the theoretical order is higher than the practical order "since before we can devise adequate means to achieve an end, this end must be known" (17). The end meant in the Aristotelian passage to which Wild refers (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1145 a7 ff.) is wisdom or theory as the end of human endeavor, that is, as true happiness, which as such belongs not to the theoretical but to the practical order (compare Thomas' commentary on the *Ethics*, 1, lect. 19). One may also say that Wild gratuitously assumes that all good things or all ends belong as such to the practical or moral order (23 n. 57; see *Nicomachean Ethics*, at the beginning, *Metaphysics*, 993 b20 ff., *De anima*, 433 a27-30).

According to Wild the practical order is characterized by contrariety, whereas the

Wild's "synthesis" of Platonism and Aristotelianism is based on a disregard of the real issue. Those scholars (Erich Frank for instance) who hold that there is a fundamental opposition between Plato and Aristotle assert that according to Aristotle not simply theory, but the theoretical or philosophic way of life, is fundamentally different from, and absolutely superior to, the practical way of life, whereas according to Plato the philosophic way of life is intrinsically practical or moral. Wild admits that they are right as regards Plato (39 ff.), and his more or less implicit attempt to disprove their contention regarding Aristotle has failed. The best one can say about his exposition is that it has left the controversy exactly as it was.

This is not to deny the validity of Wild's assertion that all the subjects treated thematically in Plato's writings are discussed from a practical point of view—in other words, that in discussing them Plato never loses sight of the elementary Socratic question of how one ought to live—whereas Aristotle's analyses have left that question far behind. He is equally right in describing Plato's practical procedure in such terms as "protreptic," "exoteric" or "maieutic," and by stressing the connection between Plato's practical approach and his use of images or myths.²⁵ But here again Wild's eagerness to arrive at "results" has prevented him from devoting sufficient attention to a most serious theoretical problem. He has not stopped to ponder the apparently overwhelming difficulty which is indicated most clearly by the term "exoteric." To put it simply, if the teaching of Plato's dialogues is exoteric, it is hard to see how one could ever get hold of Plato's esoteric or serious teaching. If one accepts the *Seventh Letter* as authentic, as Wild does (13), one has to go farther and say that Plato never wrote a book about the subjects with which he was seriously

theoretical order is beyond all contrariety (28, 31, 35). But theory as a habit has as much a contrary as any moral habit (28 n. 68), and not only "Plato's practical concepts," as Wild contends, but his theoretical ones as well (such as being and non-being, same and other, motion and rest, hard and soft, heavy and light) are divided into contraries.

²⁵ Wild, 6, 11, 16, 31 ff., 43, 74, 174, 205 ff., 291.

concerned, and that according to his most emphatic declaration no one who understands anything at all about these subjects—"nature's highest and first things"—would ever write on them (*Seventh Letter*, 341 b5 ff. and 344 d4-5). Since the meaning of any Platonic teaching decisively depends on his teaching concerning "nature," we thus seem to be led to the conclusion that no serious Platonic teaching is really accessible to us.

No one could state the difficulty more forcefully, and at the same time indicate the solution more unintentionally, than Professor Cherniss did in a recent comment on the passage to which I have just referred. He says: "For myself, I do not believe that Plato wrote [the *Seventh*] *Epistle*; but if I did, I should recognize that he has himself borne witness beforehand against anything which I might write about the real purport of his thought, and I should account it the madness born of stubborn insolence to seek to describe or even to discover the serious doctrine of a man who has condemned all those who ever have made the attempt or ever will." ²⁶

Cherniss fails to consider that according to the *Seventh Letter*, as well as according to the *Phaedrus*, no writing composed by a serious man can be quite serious,²⁷ and hence that the passage on which he bases his verdict must be understood with a grain of salt. The *Seventh Letter* does not condemn the attempt to discover the serious teaching, for since the latter is intended to be the true teaching, such condemnation would be tantamount to a condemnation of philosophy; the *Seventh Letter* merely denies that the serious teaching is communicable as other teachings are. Nor does it absolutely condemn the attempt to communicate the serious teaching in writing. The author of the *Seventh Letter*

²⁶ Harold Cherniss, *The Riddle of the Early Academy* (Berkeley 1945) p. 13. I am in full agreement with Cherniss' contention that the dialogues are the only solid basis for the understanding of Plato's teaching, and with his warning against "the easy error of mistaking general agreement [on the relative chronology of the three large groups into which all the dialogues can be distributed] for demonstration" (p. 4).

²⁷ *Seventh Letter*, 344 c3-7; *Phaedrus*, 276 d1-e3 and 277 e5 ff.

goes on to say that if the serious teaching were useful for human beings, he would consider it the most noble action of his life to communicate it in writing to "the many"; but, he says, the attempt would not be salutary for human beings, "save for some few who are capable of discovering [the serious teaching] by themselves by means of slight indication."²⁸ According to the *Seventh Letter* nothing would have prevented Plato from writing about the highest subjects in such a way as to give subtle hints to those for whom those hints would suffice, and thus not to communicate anything at all about the highest subjects to the large majority of readers. There is sufficient evidence in the dialogues to show that this was precisely what Plato did,²⁹ and thus that the dialogues have the function not of communicating but of intimating the most important truths to "some," while they have at the same time the much more obvious function of producing a salutary (civilizing, humanizing and cathartic) effect on all.

But it is one thing to try to discover Plato's serious teaching, and an entirely different thing to present one's interpretation of that teaching in writing or in any other public "speech." Cherniss is right in stressing the fact that according to the *Seventh Letter* Plato disowned beforehand any writing that would claim to present "the real purport of his thought." The *Seventh Letter* suggests that no one who, following Plato's indications, has understood his teaching would ever think of expounding it in public, because it would fill most readers with an unjustified contempt or else with a "lofty and vain expectation that they have learned some impressive things." It suggests, in other words, that no irresponsible man, or no one who would treat lightly a Platonic admonition, would ever succeed in understanding anything of Plato's serious teaching.

One does not need the evidence of the *Seventh Letter* in order

²⁸ *Seventh Letter*, 341 d2-e3. Compare *Phaedrus*, 275 d5-e3 and 276 a5-7, as well as *Protagoras*, 329 a, 343 b5, 347 e.

²⁹ *Republic*, 506 b8 to 507 a5, 509 c3-10, 517 b5-8, 533 a1-5; *Sophist*, 247 e5 to 248 a1, 254 c5-8; *Philebus*, 23 d9-e1; *Statesman*, 262 c4-7, 263 a, 284 c7-d2; *Timaeus*, 28 c3-5.

to see that Plato "prohibited" written expositions of his teaching. Since Plato refrained from presenting his most important teaching "with all clarity," the prohibition against written expositions of his teaching is self-enforcing: everyone who presents such an exposition becomes, to use a favorite Platonic expression, "ridiculous," inasmuch as he can easily be refuted and confounded by passages in the dialogues which contradict his exposition.³⁰ No interpretation of Plato's teaching can be proved fully by historical evidence. For the crucial part of his interpretation the interpreter has to fall back on his own resources: Plato does not relieve him of the responsibility for discovering the decisive part of the argument by himself. The undying controversy about the meaning of the idea of the good is a sufficiently clear sign of this. Who can say that he understands what Plato means by the idea of the good if he has not discovered by himself, though guided by Plato's hints, the exact or scientific argument which establishes the necessity and the precise character of that "idea," that is, the argument which alone would have satisfied Plato and which he refused to present to us in the *Republic* or anywhere else?

Plato composed his writings in such a way as to prevent for all time their use as authoritative texts. His dialogues supply us not so much with an answer to the riddle of being as with a most articulate "imitation" of that riddle. His teaching can never become the subject of indoctrination. In the last analysis his writings cannot be used for any purpose other than for philosophizing. In particular, no social order and no party which ever existed or which ever will exist can rightfully claim Plato as its patron.

This does not mean that the interpretation of Plato is essentially arbitrary. It means, on the contrary, that the rules of exactness

³⁰ Cherniss' interpretation, for example, culminates in the thesis that "no idea [is] ontologically prior or posterior to any other," and that Plato "could not in fact have thought of the world of ideas as such as a hierarchy at all" (53 ff.). This thesis manifestly contradicts the teaching of the *Republic*, according to which the idea of the good is the cause of all other ideas and rules over them (compare Cherniss' note on the idea of the good, on p. 98).

governing the interpretation of Plato's books are much stricter than those governing the interpretation of most books. Careful consideration of what various passages in the dialogues say about the character of good writings will gradually teach one, if this Platonic information is applied to one's reading of the dialogues, to get hold of very specific hermeneutic rules. The principle of these rules may tentatively be stated as follows: for presenting his teaching Plato uses not merely the "content" of his works (the speeches of his various characters) but also their "form" (the dialogic form in general, the particular form of each dialogue and of each section of it, the action, characters, names, places, times, situations and the like); an adequate understanding of the dialogues understands the "content" in the light of the "form." In other words, a much more careful consideration of the narrower and the wider context of each statement is required for the understanding of Plato's books than for the understanding of most books. An adequate understanding of the dialogues would enable the reader to discover the decisive indications of Plato's serious teaching. It would not supply him with ready-made answers to Plato's ultimate and most important questions.

Wild is in a way aware of the undogmatic character of the Platonic dialogues. Plato, he says, "specifically warns us against taking his own thoughts, least of all his own words, with any seriousness except as possible guides or 'reminders' of the real things in us and around us" (1). If we assume for the sake of convenience that this is a correct rendering of what the *Phaedrus* says about the deficiencies of writings as such, we will still have considerable difficulty in seeing how one can use Plato's thoughts as guides for the understanding of reality if one does not know these thoughts, and how one who is not a prophet (*Laws*, 634 e7 ff.) can know Plato's thoughts without listening to Plato's words. However this may be, Wild tends to take a statement about the deficiencies of writings as such—the statement of a man who has written his works with unsurpassed care—not as an indication of the fact that the dialogues are meant to remedy these deficiencies

as far as possible, and hence not as an admonition to read the dialogues with the utmost care, but as an encouragement to careless reading.

Thus Wild almost constantly divorces from their context the statements of Plato, or rather of Plato's characters, and integrates them into a whole that has no Platonic basis whatever.³¹ He does not even take the quite ordinary precaution of refraining from ascribing to Plato views that are expressed not by Socrates or other "spokesmen" of Plato but by sophists like Protagoras (101 ff.). Very rarely if ever does he take the trouble of exhibiting to the reader the "ascent" from the popular views from which the discussion frequently starts to the less provisional views at which it arrives, and thus he is led to ascribe the same importance to statements which are of very different specific weights. Starting from the correct principle that we must interpret Plato's myths in terms of his philosophy, and not his philosophy in terms of his myths (180), but disregarding the relation between the "content" and the "form" of the dialogues, he is led to believe that we must interpret Plato's myths in terms of the non-mythical statements of Plato's characters. In other words, since he disregards what is implied by Plato's comparison of written or unwritten speeches with living beings (*Phaedrus*, 264 b3-e2)—the principle that in a good writing every part, however small, is necessary and nothing is superfluous—he tends to believe that the images or myths occurring in the dialogues are fully explained in the dialogues.³²

For instance, in explaining the image of the cave in the begin-

³¹ Apart from the examples mentioned elsewhere in this article, I would refer the reader to Wild's interpretation of *Philebus*, 34 c ff. (153 ff.).

³² See pp. 150, 188 ff. Wild has failed to set forth clearly what he considers the function of the myths to be. According to one set of statements (180, 205 ff.) the myths are meant to lead the reader to the "formal analysis" of the subject that is mythically represented. Elsewhere (31 ff., 155 ff., 174, 179) he says that the myths are meant to suggest "historicity," which cannot be apprehended by "formal analysis." In another set of passages (73 ff., 123) he says that the myths are meant to supply us with "grounded opinions" concerning "the nature of the supreme principle, and the ultimate destiny of the soul."

ning of the seventh book of the *Republic*, he assumes that the four sections of that image correspond exactly to the four sections of the divided line to which Plato had shortly before compared the four kinds of apprehension.³³ He is thus prevented from grasping clearly the extent to which the image of the cave goes beyond the other statements of the *Republic*. To mention only the most obvious point, in the other statements of the *Republic* the stress is laid on the difference between sensible and intelligible objects, but the image of the cave shifts the emphasis to the difference between artificial and natural things: the cave-dwellers, that is, the non-philosophers, do not have any notion of "nature" and hence they do not even know artificial things as what they are; the artificial things as they understand them (that is, the objects of their conventional opinions, "the shadows of artificial things") are taken by them for *the* truth.³⁴ Led by the power of Plato's suggestions, Wild sees somehow that life in the cave is characterized by "social subjectivism" and "artificiality" (191 ff.). But by not realizing that this crucial information is part of the extent by which the myth goes beyond the non-mythical statements he fails both to see that the cave represents the city,³⁵ and to appre-

³³ See pp. 181 ff. The four parts of the "divided line" are: conjecture, conviction, reasoning, and intellectual perception. The four parts of the image of the cave are: the unperturbed life in the cave (to 515 c3), the momentary and ineffectual perturbation of that life (to 515 e5), the escape from the cave (to 516 e2), and the descent to the cave (to 517 a7). Wild is compelled by his assumption to regard the second part of the cave image as the description of an "ascent" (183 ff., 196), that is, of an actual disenchantment, whereas according to Plato no disenchantment whatever can take place within the cave: there the suspicion of "nature" is suppressed (or completely distorted) by him who has that suspicion. The dramatic presentation of this stage is "Callicles" (see especially the use that he makes of "nature" in his "philosophic" exposition, *Gorgias*, 482 c4 ff.). As regards the correspondence between "reasoning" and "escape from the cave," and its implication, it should be noted that in the image of the cave the highest stage is not the "seeing" of the sun (the intellectual perception of the idea of the good) but the "reasoning" about the sun (516 b8 ff. and 517 c1 ff.).

³⁴ This, I think, is the clue to the passage about the ideas of artificial things in the tenth book of the *Republic*.

³⁵ See (apart from the "wall" in 514 b4) the almost explicit statement in 539 e2-5 (compare 479 d3-5, 517 d8 ff., 520 c, 538 c6-d4 and e5-6). Note too the "political" form of the image of the cave in the "political" part of the *Republic* (414 d2 ff.).

ciate the specific weight of that information. The final result is lack of clarity about Plato's view of the relation between philosophy and politics.

IV

Modern writers who do not sufficiently reflect on the essential traits of modern thought are bound to modernize, and thus to distort, the thought of the classics. Accordingly, Wild understands Plato's political philosophy as a "realistic philosophy of culture." He quotes with approval the remark of a scholar that Thomas Aquinas "wrote no special treatise on the subject of culture," and that "he does not use the word at all in its modern connotation" (7). But he does not wonder whether exactly the same remark does not apply to Plato.

The "philosophy of culture" was an outgrowth of German idealism, and "culture" as a philosophic term implied a fundamental distinction between "culture" as the realm of freedom and "creativity," and "nature" as the realm of necessity; it implied the denial of natural norms of "cultural" activity. Plato, on the other hand, was primarily concerned with discovering "the natural order which must guide men's endeavors" (Wild, v). The historical root of our concept of "culture" is the fundamental change in the meaning of "nature" which became visible in the seventeenth century, and particularly in Hobbes' concept of "the state of nature." According not only to Plato and Aristotle but to "the sophists" as well, the natural was what may loosely be called the ideal, but since the seventeenth century it has come to mean what one implies when speaking of the "control" or the "conquest" of nature, in other words, what man's rational efforts have to be directed against. Wild is so unaware of this fundamental difference that he can speak of "the Callicles-Hobbesian state of nature" (95).

The political character of the cave is also indicated by the fact that the only natural beings whose shadows are seen by the cave-dwellers are human beings (515 a5-8); for the interpretation compare *Theaetetus*, 174 a8 ff. and 175 b9 ff.

By understanding Plato's political teaching in terms of "culture" he is naturally led to impute to Plato the view that there is such a thing as "scientific control over nature" (253) and that the arts or crafts serve the purpose of achieving "rational control, so far as this is possible, over each phase of human and subhuman nature" (88, 46, 54).³⁶ Possibly feeling the inadequacy of the term "culture," but obviously not sufficiently concerned with clarity about the central subject of his book, he cannot make up his mind whether "culture" is identical with "the technical hierarchy," and is thus fundamentally different from "life," as he says in one set of passages (88, 135), or whether it is identical with the "great practical order" as a whole, and thus comprises all sound human activities, as he suggests in another set of passages (46, vi, 33 ff., 43 ff.).³⁷ In view of the connection that modern philosophy has gradually established between "culture" and "history," it is not surprising that Wild, moved by the spirit not of Plato but of Marx,³⁸ Heidegger and God knows whom, speaks of "systematic anticipation of the future," the "historic nature of [the] transcendental inversion" and so on (29, 119, 165, 174, 179).

What is true of "culture" applies equally to the "realism," or more specifically the "hardheaded realism" (v), which Wild ascribes to Plato. If one wished to use a slogan that would indicate in not too misleading a fashion the intention of the greatest modern critics of classical political philosophy (such as Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Rousseau, the *Federalist*) one

³⁶ For the Platonic view of the relation between nature and art see especially *Republic*, 341 d7-e.

³⁷ Accordingly, in the only passage in which he explains what he understands by "philosophy of culture," he says first that it is "a branch of political philosophy, a division of ethics," and immediately thereafter suggests that it is identical with the "complete practical philosophy" (6; compare 42).

³⁸ See Wild (62): "As true technical control is gained over the human environment, these forcible makeshifts [the use of military force or secret power over men] will wither away." That this view is diametrically opposed to the Platonic view appears most clearly from *Theaetetus*, 176 a3-b1. On the other hand, the Marxian "dogma that all war is of economic origin" is not so much opposed to Plato's view as Wild believes (97 n.27); see *Phaedo*, 66 c5-8, and *Republic*, 372 d7 to 374 a2.

would have to say that they oppose to the "idealistic" doctrine of antiquity and the Middle Ages a "realistic" one. Divorced from any analysis as it is in Wild's presentation, the praise of political "realism" merely expresses the already "historical" fact that "idealism" has ceased to be the ruling fashion.

The political significance of the "realistic" political philosophy of the modern era, which refuses to take its bearings by "transcendent" standards, consists in the fact that it raises the status of man, that is, of every man, and thus for the first time supplies a philosophic basis for aspirations toward democracy, more precisely toward liberal democracy. This fact must be faced squarely by anyone who wishes to restore Plato's teaching in accordance with "the living aspirations of our time" (8).

In the spirit of his identification of modern thought with sophistry Wild identifies the social-contract doctrines of "social materialists . . . like Callicles and Glaucon" with "the famous social-contract theory which has played such an important role in modern political thought" (93 ff.). In doing so he overlooks the fact that the views of Callicles, as well as those of Plato and Aristotle, presuppose a natural inequality of men, whereas the famous "social-contract theorists" of modern times assume a natural equality of all men, or at least the irrelevance for natural right of men's natural inequality.

In fact, Wild is practically silent on the grave question of equality, about which Plato had so much to say. And yet, as he indicates in his preface, Wild turns to the classics because he believes that "our democratic way of life" is based on the classical view of human nature, whereas communism and national socialism are derived from German idealism. He turns to Plato in particular because he is afraid of the "reactionary drift of historic Aristotelianism" (vi, 7 ff.).

Plato, according to Wild's contention, recognized the superiority of the individual to society or the state, and "the recognition of this basic fact by Plato and by classical philosophy in general has been responsible for that respect which has been commonly

accorded to the human individual throughout the course of Western culture, at least until modern times." From Plato we can learn "what is the basis of individual rights," but modern philosophy is "anti-personal" and thus leads to "a contempt for the individual bearer of [the] rational faculty." The modern view, in other words, is said to lead to "a theory of the totalitarian state," "where, to quote Hegel, 'Staatsmacht, Religion und die Principien der Philosophie zusammenfallen'" (123 ff., 2, vi, 132-36, 158).

If one does not know it at once one merely has to take the trouble of reading the context from which Wild's quotation is taken, in order to see that Hegel merely rephrases Plato's statement according to which political misery will not cease until philosophy and political power coincide, and that the reason for his rephrasing it is his awareness of the absence from Plato's thought of the principle of "subjective freedom," that is, of the "Protestant conscience." Hegel is so far from being a "totalitarian" that he rejects Plato's political philosophy precisely because he considers it "totalitarian." Plato, he asserts, did not know the idea of freedom, an outgrowth of the Christian doctrine that "the individual *as such* has an infinite value"; according to Plato man is free only in so far as he is a philosopher.³⁹ Whatever may have to be said about Hegel's attempt to trace to Christianity the idea of the freedom of the individual, or of the rights of man, he saw with unsurpassed clarity that when Plato indicates the absolute superiority of "the individual" to society or the state, he does not mean every individual, but only the philosopher.

Wild's wish to make Plato out to be something like a political liberal leads him to assert that according to Plato "all men are

³⁹ *Encyclopädie*, §§ 552 and 482. Respect for every man as bearer of the rational faculty is, of course, Kantian rather than Platonic or Aristotelian. No one has a right to speak of the implicit "abolition" of slavery in the *Republic* (Wild, 107 n.63) if he does not at the same time, and much more emphatically, speak of Plato's explicit abolition of the family (about which Wild is completely silent); the former is inseparable from the latter.

philosophers," or wisdom "is accessible to all" (275, 108), although Plato does not tire of saying that no one can become a philosopher who does not have specific natural gifts, and that philosophic natures are extremely rare.⁴⁰ The only text that Wild adduces to prove what is perhaps his most "original theory" is a passage in the *Protagoras* which he reads: "every living member of a living community, by his daily thoughts, is a practitioner of the art of philosophy" (101 ff.). Since that passage is part of a speech of the sophist Protagoras, Wild unwittingly characterizes as sophistic the view that he attributes to Plato, and thus possibly makes an approach to the Platonic view in a somewhat un-Platonic manner.⁴¹

If one accepts the Platonic theses that wisdom constitutes the only absolutely valid title to rule, or to participate in ruling (111), and that wisdom (which is virtue in the strict sense) requires certain very rare natural gifts, one is driven to admit that the natural inequality among men as regards intellectual gifts is politically decisive, that is, that democracy is against natural right. To reconcile his democratic convictions with his Platonism Wild is compelled to assert that the translation of *aristokratia* by "aristocracy" is "thoughtless," and that "Plato's *Republic* is a 'classless society' " in which "all phases or parts of the state are ruled by wisdom which belongs to no special individual or group."⁴² Is it necessary to mention that in Plato's perfect city only the philosophers, an extremely small group, if not just one man, have the right to rule, a right absolutely independent of popular consent, to say nothing of popular control? As regards the "classless" character of Plato's perfect city, it suffices to remark that Plato calls its three parts, one of which is the philosophers, "races" (or

⁴⁰ *Republic*, 428 d11 to 429 a4, 476 b10-c1, 491 a8-b5, 495 a10-b2, 503 b7-d12; *Timaeus*, 51 e; *Seventh Letter*, 343 e to 344 a.

⁴¹ Compare *Theaetetus*, 180 c7-d7, with *Protagoras*, 316 d3 to 317 b6.

⁴² Wild, 107. In a footnote he adds: "Thus the number of guardians is a matter of indifference. They may be 'one or many.'" The word that Wild renders as "many" means in the context "more (than one)"; compare *Republic*, 487 a, 503 b7-d12.

"classes") and "nations" (or "tribes"), and membership in the various different classes is explicitly said to be, as a rule, hereditary.⁴³

Wild simply substitutes for Plato's rule of philosophers, that is, of a specific type of men, the "rule" of philosophy, that is, the "rule" of popularized philosophy or science over the minds of the whole citizen-body. Because of his failure to try to understand modern philosophy he is blind to the fundamental difference between the "aristocratic" concept of philosophy or science, which is characteristic of classical philosophy and is irreconcilable with the idea of popular enlightenment, and the "democratic" concept, which emerged first through the efforts of men like Bacon, Descartes and Hobbes⁴⁴ and is the philosophic basis of popular enlightenment or of the revolutionizing influence of philosophy on society as a whole.

If all men are potential philosophers there can be no doubt as to the natural harmony between philosophy and politics which is

⁴³ *Republic*, 415 a7-b1, 420 b7, 428 e7, 460 c6, 466 a5, 577 a1 and b3; *Timaeus*, 17 c7; *Critias*, 110 c3. Note especially *Timaeus*, 24 a-b and 25 e, on the kinship between Plato's perfect order and the Egyptian caste system. For the interpretation of *Republic*, 415 a7-b1, see *Cratylus*, 394 a-d, and Aristotle, *Politics*, 1255 a40 ff.

⁴⁴ Bacon, *Novum Organum*, I 122; Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, I, at the beginning; Hobbes, *Leviathan*, chs. 13 and 15, and *Elements of Law*, I ch. 10 § 8; Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden*, Zusatz 2 (compare Julius Ebbinghaus, *Zu Deutschlands Schicksalswende*, Frankfurt a.M. 1946, 27 ff.); Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, Vorrede (ed. by Lasson, 2nd ed., p. 10), and *Rechtsphilosophie*, Vorrede (ed. by Gans, 3rd ed., p. 13). In regard to Hobbes' "paulatim eruditur vulgus" compare Luther's "der gemeine Mann wird verständig" (*Von weltlicher Oberkeit*). Wild's mistaking the philosopher for every man seems to be due to the apparent ambiguity of what Plato says about the relation between education and the political or legislative art (67): Plato "seems hardly to have made up his mind as to which really directs the other" (66). Wild solves the difficulty for Plato by asserting, on the one hand, that "statesmanship attends rationally to all the non-rational needs of the human flock" and "education attends rationally to the specifically rational needs of the rational animal" (68), and, on the other, that Plato's state is a theocracy which does not admit of a separation between church and state (109 ff., 117, 122) and hence obviously attends to "the rational needs of the rational animal." Plato has solved the difficulty in the *Republic*, whose subject is precisely the relation between education and politics, by distinguishing two kinds of education (522 a2-b3), the education of all, and the education of potential philosophers.

presupposed by the idea of popular enlightenment. Regardless of his attitude to popular enlightenment, Plato would have believed in such a harmony if he had held, as Wild thinks he did, that it is of the essence of the philosopher, who as such has left the "cave" of political life, again to descend to it.⁴⁵ But according to the *Republic*, in which Plato treated this subject more comprehensively than anywhere else, the philosopher's "descent" is due to compulsion or force, and this kind of compulsion is legitimate only in the perfect social order: in an imperfect society the philosopher is not likely to engage in political activity of any kind, but will rather lead a life of privacy.⁴⁶

If the question whether there is a natural harmony between philosophy and politics is stated in Platonic terms, the answer is likely to depend, for all practical purposes, on whether one believes that the actualization of the perfect order is "normal" or an improbable possibility. Plato certainly accepted the second alternative, as Wild admits (108). The ultimate answer will depend on how one judges of the possibility of its actualization, regardless of considerations of probability. The end of the seventh book of the *Republic* leaves hardly any doubt as to Plato's denial of that possibility.

However this may be, the question can be settled *ad hominem* as follows. According to Plato's repeated assertion, the perfect order cannot become actual if the ruling philosophers do not possess direct and adequate knowledge of the idea of the good, and Wild suggests that such knowledge is not possible.⁴⁷ Since

⁴⁵ Wild, 180, 273 ff., 123, 136. For a rather divergent statement see 160.

⁴⁶ *Republic*, 519 b7 to 520 c3, 592 a7-b6, 496 c5-e2. According to Wild, *Republic* 518 a-b5 teaches that ascent and descent are of the essence of the philosopher, as distinguished from the sophist, who "does not move at all." In that passage Plato attributes descent and ascent to two different types. Wild's statement that the sophist "does not move at all and suffers no real confusion" (274) is contradicted not only by Plato's presentations of sophists and by *Sophist* 254 a4 (quoted by Wild in the same context), but by Wild's own repeated statements that the philosopher and the sophist "are moving in opposite directions" (305 ff., 240, 254, 294; the italics are Wild's).

⁴⁷ Wild, 175 ff., 188, 203, 30, 74, 143. See especially *Republic*, 505 a4-b1 (compare 504 c1-4) and 516 b4-8, 532 a7-b3.

the philosopher's descent to the "cave" is supposed to take place after he has achieved direct and adequate knowledge of the idea of the good, it follows from Wild's suggestion that that descent can never take place: the philosopher will have to devote himself throughout his life to the unfinished and unfinishable task of philosophy. While Wild's suggestion is contradicted by numerous passages in the *Republic*, it would seem to be supported by the *Phaedo*, to which he refers.⁴⁸ One could explain the difference between the teachings of the two dialogues by the difference between their conversational settings, and a case could be made for the view that the setting of the *Phaedo* allows of a more "realistic" presentation of philosophy than does that of the *Republic*.⁴⁹

One would grossly misunderstand Wild's intentions if one were to draw the conclusion that he is on the verge of transcending the "political" interpretation of Plato's philosophy. His admission that philosophy has an essentially fragmentary character is merely the prelude to a suggestion that philosophy must be subordinated to theology.⁵⁰ Only on the basis of this suggestion can he maintain within the Platonic framework the natural harmony

⁴⁸ Wild, 143, 188. Compare *Phaedo*, 99 c8-e1, with *Republic*, 516 b4-8. See *Laws*, 897 d8-e1, and 898 d9 ff.

⁴⁹ The *Republic*, one could say, is deliberately "utopian," not merely regarding politics but likewise regarding philosophy: the citizens and rulers that it envisages are "gods or sons of gods" (*Laws*, 739 d6). But whereas the political utopia cannot guide political action (except in the vague sense of "inspiring" it), the philosophic utopia can and must guide philosophic "action." In other words, whereas there are no examples of a genuine "political order" (compare *Statesman*, 293 c5-7), there are a number of examples of genuine philosophers. The *Phaedo* also throws light on Wild's assertion regarding the reason why the philosopher must "descend." The philosopher, he says, "is bound by the ties of nature to his fellow prisoners in the Cave" (273 ff.). The *Phaedo*, however, shows how little Socrates was bound by any ties to his nearest relatives, to Xantippe and his children (60 a). Note also the somewhat divergent remarks of the *Phaedo* and the *Republic* about war (see note 38 above).

⁵⁰ This is the implication of the following statement: "Thus [that is, on the basis of a certain confusion] theology will be interpreted in terms of philosophy, philosophy in terms of science, and science will be operationally interpreted in terms of technical procedure" (200). See also 77.

between philosophy and politics and at the same time deny the possibility of direct and adequate knowledge of "the supreme principle"; for what cannot be achieved by philosophy left to itself may be achieved by philosophy illumined by theology. Divine revelation, and not philosophy, supplies that sufficient knowledge of the idea of the good which is indispensable for the actualization of the perfect social order.

It is by making this tacit assumption that Wild finds an example of Plato's perfect city in the early Apostolic church, in which "one and the same wisdom . . . demands . . . the subordination of all the vital activities of the general body to the general doctrinal plan, formulated and guarded by the great councils, maintained and enforced by the schools and administrative offices of the Church" (108). We need not dwell on Wild's notion of "the Platonic-Christian state," which he also calls the "rational or Platonic state" (116 ff.). It goes without saying that there is no place in Plato's teaching for a theology that "lays down certain specifications which determine the general form of philosophy" (77), and that Wild is somewhat nearer to Plato when he designates as mythology what in his own language would be theology (73 ff., 203). Not without good reason did Plato replace the Egyptian rule of priests by his rule of philosophers.

One may add that according to Wild the only example of a perfect social order was of rather short duration. He asserts a parallelism between the decline of Plato's aristocracy first into timocracy and then into oligarchy and the decline of the early church first into post-Constantinian Catholicism and then into modern life, with its fundamental principle of the separation of church and state. If Wild still believes in the natural harmony between philosophy and politics, this can be due only to his anticipation of an early transformation of our present "anarchy (democracy)" into "the Platonic-Christian state" (109 ff., 117). One is left wondering with what right he can oppose Maritain's assertion that "only religion can save man from totalitarianism" and quietly state that "this theory simply does not accord with

the facts" (9). The only explanation of which I can think is that he was for a moment dazzled, if not enlightened, by the flame of philosophy.

v

One can imagine a man writing a book on the political problem of our time in the guise of a book on Plato's political philosophy. While it would be a very bad book if regarded as an interpretation of Plato, it might be excellent as a guide amidst the perplexities of our age. Wild almost promises such a book by demanding that we "try to translate Plato's social vocabulary into living terms, and exemplify his discussion by familiar modern examples, subordinating literal, 'historical' accuracy to philosophical exactitude" (106 ff.).

We have seen that Wild claims to look at the crucial political issue of our time from the point of view of a "progressive" interpretation of the American "democratic way of life." By imputing, rightly or wrongly, his own antifascist views to Plato he obviously wishes to counteract the misuse of Plato's teaching by fascists, and thus to deprive fascism of one of its strongest "ideological" weapons. He holds that only so-called scholars could interpret "the *Republic* as an 'aristocracy,'" and that "this favorite fallacy of German nineteenth-century scholarship," which "has now become fashionable in America," underlies the interpretation of the *Republic* as the "original philosophical charter of Fascism" (116, 107). We shall have to consider briefly how a man who is obviously a real scholar, who has obviously acquired by signal achievements the moral right to call the great historians and philologists of nineteenth-century Germany so-called scholars, and who, in addition, has put on the armor of "philosophical exactitude"—how such a man saves democracy and crushes fascism.

He suggests that "the root conception of fascist political thought" is the denial of "the supremacy of the legislative branch over the executive," a denial prepared by the use of "the very words 'sovereign,' 'leader,' and even 'executive'" (100, 104). To

mention only one of a host of objections that must be obvious to everyone, Wild's suggestion is a very poor defense of democracy because, as every schoolboy knows, the legislative power may be vested in one or a few, as well as in all or the representatives of all. Wild says too little, that is, nothing that is not completely vague, about popular influence on the legislative branch, and he says too much, that is, contradictory things, about the relation between "the legislative process" and "wisdom" (103, 106). In a sense more serious is what follows from his suggestion regarding the relation between Plato and fascism. If the denial of the supremacy of the legislative branch is fascism, or comes dangerously close to fascism, certainly the author of the *Statesman*, who as a matter of principle denied the very necessity of laws, to say nothing of a legislative branch of government, would be one of the most outstanding forerunners of fascism. At any rate, neither Plato nor Aristotle could even dream of competing with John Locke as unambiguous and unreserved defenders of the supremacy of the legislative branch as such.

Wild makes a distinction between "what we mean by 'democracy' today" and actual democracy (111-17): "What we mean by 'democracy' today is movement in the direction away from" fascism; actual democracy is something between oligarchy (rule by "those higher up in the productive hierarchy") and anarchy ("the conquest of individualistic consumption over productive order"). The only salvation is some form of socialism. But "socialism in actual practice must be transformed into some form of authoritarianism, Christian socialism or State socialism, or into some form of tyranny such as so-called national socialism" (113). "State socialism," which is apparently the same as "socialism proper," is rejected because it is "materialistic" and attempts "to make every man a drone" (113). Hence the final alternative is "some rational authoritarianism, either Christian socialism or Nazi socialism, either control by rational authority or control by irrational authority" (117). Thus national socialism, as distinguished from socialism proper, which apparently has to be classi-

fied as irrational authoritarianism, finally acquires the status of rational authoritarianism. The reason is stated by Wild with unusual clarity: "Anarchy (democracy) can proceed no farther. . . . Our great democracies must go one way or the other. *Order must be achieved.* . . . There is no longer any way of postponing the choice," which is the choice between Christian socialism and national socialism (117; italics mine). One cannot demand more emphatically that democracy be abandoned at once in favor of one of the two forms of "rational authoritarianism"—Christian socialism or national socialism.

This demand accords very well with the following diagnosis of fascism. In their fight against the "parasitic 'political bosses'" (presumably the union leaders) "those higher up in the productive hierarchy" (that "'orderly class'" to which "such traces of law and order as still remain belong"), or "the orderly rich," are "forced to band together for defense against the encroachments of 'democracy.' If they succeed, they will set up a Fascist regime of law and order, accentuating the traditional hierarchies of the state, and ruthlessly suppressing all 'democracy.' The only other possibility is that a political genius or stinging drone may 'protect' the people from such a class revolution and become an absolute dictator" (115).

I do not for a moment believe that Wild intends to preach fascism or national socialism. In the same breath in which he makes the statements quoted in the preceding paragraphs he says that "even the anarchy of pure 'democracy' is preferable" to fascism, and that "the tyrannical state" is "the lowest depth to which human life can sink" (116 ff.). In the language of the prophet in the tenth book of the *Republic*, Wild can rightly say to those who are tempted by his statements to choose national socialism in preference to democracy, or democracy in preference to national socialism: "the responsibility is with the chooser, Wild has no responsibility." I have not the slightest doubt that what he says about the issue of democracy versus fascism is the outcome of that same "philosophical exactitude" which characterizes his

whole work, or of that "insolent assertiveness of transitory conjecture" which he ascribes to "democratic man" (165).

A man who claims to be a Platonist, and who publishes in this country at this time a book on Plato's political philosophy, bears more than the ordinary responsibility that is borne by every writer. Wild has not merely grossly failed to give a not too grossly misleading picture of Plato's views, and especially of his political views; he has also supplied the numerous enemies of Plato and of Platonic studies with the strongest weapon for which they could wish. Someone had to write something like the present article in order that the question which underlies Wild's book, but which has never been a question for him, be prevented, as far as this is possible or necessary, from suffering the same fate that his book so richly deserves.